

## ***An Image of a Tiger***

**Jess Bradford**

For Bradford, a cultural theme park in Singapore, Haw Par Villa, becomes a metaphor for a country that has been weathered by moving, shifting shades of power, colonization and de-colonization, and capital driven cosmopolitan thoroughfare. Its complex history of territorialization calls for the nuances of an aesthetic strategy to approach a conversation in relation to civic identity.

In *An Image of a Tiger* (2018), Bradford's exhibition has curated found photographic documents of Haw Par Villa, by reproducing these images, in their original intimate scale, with the language of brushstroke. These images exist as an inexplicable fragment of a larger whole that we can no longer gain access to. Based loosely in the circa of the 1950s, these images mix with her memory of the theme park and thus, possess a nebulous coherence. In a way they are images of ruins, as the park (now maintained by the Singaporean Tourism Board) has been renovated several times, each a bid to articulate ideal representations of Chinese culture. This exhibition presents the viewer with salvaged fragments of family photographs that mutely point to lost contexts, ownership, capital transfer, and systems of meaning.

Gerhard Richter's painting sought to renounce a connection between the surface appearance of the artwork and reality, echoing our doubt in human knowledge, and that we can never know what is there. In a similar but also singular process of her own, Bradford mulls on her reproduction of a reproduction of reality. Here she goes beyond producing a simulacrum (an independent reality lacking depth). Rather, in Bradford's reproduction a gap opens in the fracture in which the distinction between the real falls away. Not only does Bradford's translation of image echo the physical transformations that the theme park undergoes, but her action also re-replaces the image - as a memory with a new intensity. The images are a kind of happening at this very moment, something that once existed, but now transformed. What unfolds in her practice is reminiscent of the sound experiments from William Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops*, or Leyland Kirky's (as the Caretaker) recordings of samples. Here the process of re-playing sounds, or re-replacing an image, re-contextualises memory alongside disintegration and/or loss that is revealed in poetic form.

In *Matter and Memory*, the philosopher Henri Bergson poses that time makes things change in a qualitative way. Bradford's re-representation of these images - women playing, a form of rhinoceros, a mermaid, a shepherd narrative - concerns conservation of the past in the present. These paintings are freshly painted and yet evoke a nostalgia; perhaps it is their production in grey-tone scale. Nonetheless these wondrous images carry a common stillness that serves to bind them into a different era, a trigger that unfolds this process of memory and draws on the subconscious. The images become part of our lived experience and react on other images, with a real duration, and movement. Producing heterogeneous moments, it highlights the contingency of representation, all the while historically merging history and setting. I would imagine that identity arises through a trajectory that is inscribed by memories - through the duration of complex forms of images that are built, rebuilt, collaged, erased, in disintegration, or even subconscious, and mythical. Theme parks have always seemed to me a kind of non-place (utopia), although physically available, but in the form of a diorama/or simulacra of a world. Likewise, a complex cultural identity today belongs to no single physical place in particular. We could speculate that it lies in the production of memory. But personal memory lives from images not from abstract facts (which are secondary).

A visual tension between the grey-scale imagery, and its re-replacement within a warmer spectrum of tones extends throughout the rest of the installation (like a disjoint of timeliness). Colour has always existed, but the greyscale images pull us back to a time past, where things are sometimes revealed, available, or not. The images appear like ghosts mingling with the rest of the installation; perhaps conflating the imagination and the factual. This is an aesthetic choice of Bradford's that does not choose to explicitly signal a meaning. For me, this juxtaposition of tonal range produces a kind of conduit that displaces the experience of time, and the emotions (or colour) rather, are displaced, or inaccessible in places. Perhaps in the bright palette of

the ceramic monuments, they leak out in the space between freedom, and the restriction of her painting frame. Here Bradford has realized that clay is freer than the brush. This wider spectrum of colour in the miniature landscape that Bradford has constructed (a looser interpretation of form), is bordered off by the greyscale images. In particular, one ceramic monument looks to be coloured by the melting drops of an ice-cream sun, objects that Bradford suggests are semblances of the mythological geological landscape of Chinese mountains. The formal innovation of the paintings' frames, yet another form of diorama, places the images through another loop of re-contextualization.

This play with framing is extended third fold via the innovation in the form of shelving on which the latter is placed. The shelf appears like a uterus shaped island, or a giant and wobbly lucky horse shoe. But here the edges for this frame is looser than the square angles of the painting frame, and even looser than the cast like angles of the ceramic monuments. The curves of the wooden shelving come closest to our bodies in the gallery, like the edge formed by sea waves in a littoral zone. This shelf like plinth expands the territory of the image into a new topology of form. We enter an indeterminate zone of unsettling mystery absorbed within the constant and ephemeral context of time. Delving into the construction of memory, *An Image of a Tiger* opens up a mythical space in its ambiguity to the located source.

Often our identities are attached to a place of symbolic significance that sets our memories. What fascinates me about these traces is that they are real, always authentic - even if the politics is not. Perhaps what we replace (like Bradford's images), and moulds our process of individuation is something that happens in a freer field of emotions: when we do not conform to a closed society based on rules and moral codes, interpreted in a strict and literal way. We are enticed by the thrilling sensation of freedom, an open society which expresses creativity, and imagination. Here we can understand that any intentional grouping of symbols and imagery begins the process of a collage of desires. In this case, it sits elegantly in a new playful, and scenic topology.

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